10 declassified Government Secrets

During the Cold War, the CIA initiated Project MK-ULTRA, a secret and illegal human research program to investigate potential mind-control systems. The program's operators examined the effects of hypnosis, biological agents and drugs, such as LSD and barbiturates, on human subjects. Some historians suggest the program was designed to develop a mind-control system that could be used to "program" the brains of potential assassins. [[The 10 Craziest Military Experiments](http://www.livescience.com/12991-10-outrageous-military-experiments.html)]

In 1973, then-CIA director Richard Helms ordered that all documents from Project MK-ULTRA be destroyed, but a formal investigation into the program was launched several years later. The project became the basis for several movies, such as "The Manchurian Candidate" and "The Men Who Stare at Goats."

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<div class="countdown\_data"> <div><h2>A secret history</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;Government and military secrets can range from terrifying to amusing to downright absurd, but most are nothing short of intriguing. From a secret U.S. Air Force project to build a supersonic flying saucer to a now-famous World War II-era research program that produced the first atomic bombs, here are seven declassified military or CIA secrets.&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>Project 1794</h2><p>&lt;p&gt; In late 2012, the U.S. Air Force declassified a trove of documents, including records of a secret program to build a flying saucer-type aircraft designed to shoot down Soviet bombers. The ambitious program, called &lt;a href=&quot;http://www.technewsdaily.com/8214-flying-saucer-air-force.html&quot;&gt;Project 1794&lt;/a&gt;, was initiated in the 1950s, and a team of engineers was tasked with building a disc-shape vehicle capable of traveling at supersonic speeds at high altitudes.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; The declassified documents reveal plans for the plane to reach a top speed of Mach 4 (four times the speed of sound), and reach an altitude of 100,000 feet (30,480 meters). The project&amp;#39;s estimated cost was more than $3 million, which in today&amp;#39;s dollars would be more than $26 million.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; Project 1794 was canceled in December 1961 after tests suggested the flying saucer design was aerodynamically unstable and would likely be uncontrollable at high speeds (let alone &lt;a href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/39829-fastest-military-airplanes.html&quot;&gt;supersonic speeds&lt;/a&gt;).&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>Project Iceworm</h2><p>&lt;p&gt; In the 1960s, the U.S. Army embarked on a secret mission to build a series of mobile nuclear missile launch sites under the &lt;a href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/39298-under-the-greenland-ice-sheet.html&quot;&gt;Greenland ice sheet&lt;/a&gt;. The objective was to house medium-range missiles close enough to strike targets within the Soviet Union.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; The program was codenamed Project Iceworm, but to test its feasibility, the Army launched a cover research project called &amp;quot;Camp Century&amp;quot; in 1960. Under this guise, engineers built a network of underground buildings and tunnels, including living quarters, a kitchen, a recreation hall, infirmary, laboratories, supply rooms, a communications center and a nuclear power plant.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; The base, which was kept secret from the Danish government, operated for seven years. The program was canceled in 1966 after shifting ice created unstable conditions. Today, the crushed remains of Project Iceworm are buried beneath Arctic snow.&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>Project MK-ULTRA</h2><p>&lt;p&gt; During the Cold War, the CIA initiated Project MK-ULTRA, a secret and illegal human research program to investigate potential mind-control systems. The program&amp;#39;s operators examined the effects of hypnosis, biological agents and drugs, such as LSD and barbiturates, on human subjects. Some historians suggest the program was designed to develop a mind-control system that could be used to &amp;quot;program&amp;quot; the brains of potential assassins. [&lt;a href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/12991-10-outrageous-military-experiments.html&quot;&gt;The 10 Craziest Military Experiments&lt;/a&gt;]&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; In 1973, then-CIA director Richard Helms ordered that all documents from Project MK-ULTRA be destroyed, but a formal investigation into the program was launched several years later. The project became the basis for several movies, such as &amp;quot;The Manchurian Candidate&amp;quot; and &amp;quot;The Men Who Stare at Goats.&amp;quot;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>Area 51</h2><p>&lt;p&gt; Almost no other site has garnered as much attention from conspiracy theorists and UFO-enthusiasts as &lt;a href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/38943-area-51-documents-unclassified.html&quot;&gt;Area 51&lt;/a&gt;, a remote desert tract near Groom Lake in Nevada, roughly 83 miles (134 kilometers) northwest of Las Vegas. The intense secrecy surrounding the base sparked peoples&amp;#39; imaginations, and Area 51 was commonly linked to paranormal activities, including pervasive theories that suggested Area 51 hid aliens and &lt;a href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/20645-ufo-sightings.html&quot;&gt;UFOs&lt;/a&gt;.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; In July 2013, declassified documents from the CIA acknowledged the existence of Area 51 for the first time, and confirmed that the &lt;a href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/23514-area-51.html&quot;&gt;top-secret site&lt;/a&gt; was used to test a variety of spy planes, including the well-known U-2 reconnaissance aircraft.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; While Area 51, which operates as a detachment of Edwards Air Force Base in neighboring California, has never been declared a covert base, the research and activities conducted there were some of the nation&amp;#39;s most closely guarded secrets. &lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>Project Grudge</h2><p>&lt;p&gt; While Area 51 was not a top-secret base designed to study extraterrestrials, the U.S. Air Force did study the &lt;a href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/20645-ufo-sightings.html&quot;&gt;existence of UFOs&lt;/a&gt;. Project Grudge was a short-lived program launched in 1949 to study unidentified flying objects. The mission followed an earlier program, known as Project Sign, which published a report in early 1949 stating that while some UFOs seemed to be actual aircraft, there was not enough data to determine their origins. [&lt;a href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/16184-ufo-sightings-aliens-states-infographic.html&quot;&gt;Top 10 States for UFO Sightings&lt;/a&gt;]&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; Critics of Project Grudge said the program solely set out to debunk UFO reports, and very little actual research was conducted. In his book on the topic, Edward J. Ruppelt, Air Force Captain and director of Project Grudge, wrote: &amp;quot;[I]t doesn&amp;#39;t take a great deal of study of the old UFO files to see that standard intelligence procedures were not being followed by Project Grudge. Everything was being evaluated on the premise that UFOs couldn&amp;#39;t exist. No matter what you see or hear, don&amp;#39;t believe it.&amp;quot;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>Operation Paperclip</h2><p>&lt;p&gt; In September 1946, President Harry Truman authorized a program called Operation Paperclip, which aimed to lure scientists from Nazi Germany to the United States following World War II. Officials at the Office of Strategic Services (the predecessor to the CIA) recruited German scientists to America to aid the country&amp;#39;s postwar efforts, which would also ensure that valuable scientific knowledge would not end up in the hands of the Soviet Union or the divided East and West Germany.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; Operation Paperclip&amp;#39;s most famous recruit was rocket scientist &lt;a href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/11380-top-10-mad-scientists.html&quot;&gt;Wernher von Braun&lt;/a&gt;, who would go on to mastermind &lt;a href=&quot;http://www.space.com/12771-nasa-apollo-missions-photo-countdown.html&quot;&gt;NASA&amp;#39;s Apollo moon missions&lt;/a&gt;. &lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>Manhattan Project</h2><p>&lt;p&gt; One of the most well-known secret research programs is the Manhattan Project, which eventually produced the world&amp;#39;s first atomic bombs. The project began in 1939, and was cloaked in secrecy as physicists investigated the potential power of atomic weapons. From 1942 to 1946, Major General Leslie Groves of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers led the Manhattan Project.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; The &lt;a href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/1698-atomic-bomb-test-exposed-civilians-radiation.html&quot;&gt;first nuclear bomb was detonated&lt;/a&gt; at 5:30 a.m. on July 16, 1945, during the so-called Trinity test at the Alamogordo Air Base, 120 miles (193 km) south of Albuquerque, N.M. The explosion created a mushroom cloud that stretched 40,000 feet (12,200 m), and the bomb&amp;#39;s explosive power was equivalent to more than 15,000 tons of TNT.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt; A month after the Trinity test, two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in the waning stages of World War II. To date, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remain the only uses of nuclear weapons in war.&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> < /div>

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**Project 1794**

Credit: National Archives

In late 2012, the U.S. Air Force declassified a trove of documents, including records of a secret program to build a flying saucer-type aircraft designed to shoot down Soviet bombers. The ambitious program, called [Project 1794](http://www.technewsdaily.com/8214-flying-saucer-air-force.html), was initiated in the 1950s, and a team of engineers was tasked with building a disc-shape vehicle capable of traveling at supersonic speeds at high altitudes.

The declassified documents reveal plans for the plane to reach a top speed of Mach 4 (four times the speed of sound), and reach an altitude of 100,000 feet (30,480 meters). The project's estimated cost was more than $3 million, which in today's dollars would be more than $26 million.

Project 1794 was canceled in December 1961 after tests suggested the flying saucer design was aerodynamically unstable and would likely be uncontrollable at high speeds (let alone [supersonic speeds](http://www.livescience.com/39829-fastest-military-airplanes.html)).

While Area 51 was not a top-secret base designed to study extraterrestrials, the U.S. Air Force did study the [existence of UFOs](http://www.livescience.com/20645-ufo-sightings.html). Project Grudge was a short-lived program launched in 1949 to study unidentified flying objects. The mission followed an earlier program, known as Project Sign, which published a report in early 1949 stating that while some UFOs seemed to be actual aircraft, there was not enough data to determine their origins. [[Top 10 States for UFO Sightings](http://www.livescience.com/16184-ufo-sightings-aliens-states-infographic.html)]

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<div class="countdown\_data"> <div><h2>Intro</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;While some might harbor fears of dying from a lightning strike or shark attack, the cause of your ultimate demise is likely to be much less conspicuous.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Here are the top 10 leading causes of death in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The data are based on deaths in 2007, the most recent year for which statistics are available.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>&lt;strong&gt;Septicemia&lt;/strong&gt;</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Septicemia, or &lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|8831|bacteria%20in%20the%20bloodstream))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/8831-sepsis-long-term-impact-older-adults-study-finds.html&quot;&gt;bacteria in the bloodstream&lt;/a&gt; , killed 34,828 people in 2007. It can result from infections throughout the body, including infections of the lung, abdomen and urinary tract, according to the National Institutes of Health. Treatment of infections, and vaccination with the Haemophilus influenzae B (HIB) vaccine and S. pneumoniae vaccines, can help prevent the condition.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>&lt;strong&gt;Kidney disorders&lt;/strong&gt;</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|35081|Kidney%20disorders%20))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/35081-chronic-kidney-disease-biomarkers-101021.html&quot;&gt;Kidney disorders &lt;/a&gt; including nephritis, nephrotic syndrome, and nephrosis were responsible for 46,448 deaths in 2007. Nephritis is an inflammation of the kidneys that can be caused by infection or an allergic reaction to a drug. Nephrotic syndrome is characterized by a buildup of protein in the urine. Among the causes of the condition are: infection, response to drugs, cancer, immune disorders, diabetes or lupus. Nephrosis is damage to the kidneys that can be caused by pain medication, or chronic conditions such as diabetes, lupus or high blood pressure.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>&lt;strong&gt;Influenza and pneumonia&lt;/strong&gt;</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Influenza and pneumonia killed 52,717 people in 2007. Influenza, or &lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|9122|the%20flu))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/9122-7-health-woes-brought-winter.html&quot;&gt;the flu&lt;/a&gt; , is a respiratory illness caused by a virus. The old, the young and pregnant women are particularly at risk for complications from the flu, according to the CDC. A seasonal flu shot can help prevent infection.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Pneumonia occurs when viruses or bacteria in the lungs cause an infection. Those older than 65 or younger than 5 are at high risk of catching the disease. Vaccination with the flu, pneumococcal, pertussis measles, varicella and Haemophilus influenzae type b vaccines may help prevent infection, according to the CDC. Following good hygiene practices also reduces the risk.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>&lt;strong&gt;Diabetes&lt;/strong&gt;</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|10195|Diabetes))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/10195-1-3-americans-diabetes-2050-cdc.html&quot;&gt;Diabetes&lt;/a&gt; accounted for 71,382 deaths in 2007. The condition is characterized by abnormally high blood sugar levels, and can lead to kidney failure, blindness, heart disease and amputations of the lower extremities, such as the feet. Risk factors include obesity, old age, a family history of diabetes and not exercising, according to the CDC. Regular exercise and maintaining a healthy weight can reduce the risk of developing the disease.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>&lt;strong&gt;Alzheimer's disease&lt;/strong&gt;</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|35248|Alzheimer's%20disease))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/35248-alzheimers-brain-plaques-clearence-101209.html&quot;&gt;Alzheimer's disease&lt;/a&gt; killed 74,632 people in 2007. The condition is the most common form of dementia in older adults, according to the CDC. The disease is characterized by problems with memory, language and thinking and can make it difficult to carry out daily activities.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Alzheimer's typically begins around age 60, and the risk of the disease increases with age. Those with a family history of Alzheimer's or specific genetic traits are at risk for the condition. Reducing head trauma, keeping a healthy heart and maintaining a healthy weight may reduce your risk of the disease, according to the Alzheimer's Association.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>&lt;strong&gt;Accidents&lt;/strong&gt;</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Accidents, or unintentional injuries, accounted for 123,706 deaths in 2007. Within this category, the most significant killers were &lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|9203|car%20accidents))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/9203-obesity-increases-risk-death-car-crash.html&quot;&gt;car accidents&lt;/a&gt; , which caused 42,031 deaths; falls, which lead to 22,631 deaths; and poisonings, which killed 29,846 people.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Though accidents were the No. 5 cause of death among all age groups, motor vehicle accidents were the leading cause of death for those under 34 years old, according to the CDC. For those ages 35 to 74, unintentional poisonings, including drug overdoses, account for more deaths than car crashes. Falls are the leading cause of injury-related death among those 65 and older.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>&lt;strong&gt;Chronic lower respiratory diseases&lt;/strong&gt;</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Chronic lower respiratory diseases, a group of diseases that affect the airways and lungs, were responsible for 127,924 deaths in 2007. The most lethal chronic lower respiratory disease is &lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|35095|chronic%20obstructive%20pulmonary%20disease%20(COPD))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/35095-lung-taste-receptors-asthma-treatment-101025.html&quot;&gt;chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD&lt;/a&gt; ), which includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Chronic bronchitis is characterized by swollen and narrow airways inside the lung while emphysema is caused by damaged lung air sacs. Both these conditions make breathing difficult.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Smoking is the main culprit behind COPD. Men who smoke are 12 times more likely to die of COPD than men who have never smoked, according to the CDC, and avoiding smoking and secondhand smoke can reduce the risk of this condition.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>&lt;strong&gt;Stroke &lt;/strong&gt;</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Stroke accounted for 135,952 deaths in 2007. A &lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|35295|stroke))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/35295-stroke-belt-fried-fish-higher-death-rate-101222.html&quot;&gt;stroke&lt;/a&gt; occurs when the blood supply to an area of the brain is obstructed, causing brain cells to die, or when a brain blood vessel bursts, according to the CDC. It can lead to paralysis, speech difficulties and death.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, being overweight or obese, drinking excessive amounts of alcohol and smoking. Men have a greater risk of stroke than women. Eating a healthy diet, exercising and maintain a healthy weight are activities that can reduce stroke risk, according to the CDC.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>&lt;strong&gt;Cancer &lt;/strong&gt;</h2><p>&lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;Cancer of all types was responsible for the deaths of more than 562,800 people in 2007. &lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|11041|Cancer))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/11041-10-deadliest-cancers-cure.html&quot;&gt;Cancer&lt;/a&gt; refers to uncontrolled cellular growth, which can occur in many different tissue types. The most common cancers in men are prostate cancer, lung cancer and colorectal cancer, according to the CDC.. The most common cancers in women are&lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|34706|%20breast%20cancer))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/34706-breast-cancer-symptoms-treatment-prevention.html&quot;&gt; breast cancer&lt;/a&gt; , followed by lung and colorectal cancer. Lung cancer causes the most deaths among men and women, followed in women by breast cancer.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;A combination of hereditary and lifestyle factors likely contribute to a person's cancer risk. Quitting smoking may &lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|35108|reduce%20the%20risk%20of%20several%20types%20of%20cancer))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/35108-10-dos-and-donts-to-reduce-your-risk-of-cancer.html&quot;&gt;reduce the risk of several types of cancer&lt;/a&gt; , including lung and kidney cancer, according to the National Cancer Institute. There is also evidence that a diet rich in fruit and non-starchy vegetables may reduce the risk of mouth, esophagus and stomach cancers. Obesity has been linked to an increased risk of several cancers, including colorectal and endometrial cancer.&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> <div><h2>&lt;strong&gt;Heart disease&lt;/strong&gt;</h2><p>&lt;p&gt; &lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;/p&gt;& lt;p&gt;&lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|35257|Heart%20disease))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/35257-heart-disease-stroke-mortality-health-costs-101215.html&quot;&gt;Heart disease&lt;/a&gt; was the No. 1 cause of death in the United States in 2007. It claimed 616,067 lives, about a quarter of all deaths in the United States. A number of conditions fall into the category of &quot;heart disease,&quot; including coronary artery disease the most common type of heart disease and problems with heart rhythm. Risk factors include &lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|10249|obesity))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/10249-obesity-reach-42-friend-effect.html&quot;&gt;obesity&lt;/a&gt; , smoking, &lt;a alt=&quot;((CONLINK|34753|high%20blood%20pressure))&quot; href=&quot;http://www.livescience.com/34753-hypertension-high-blood-pressure.html&quot;&gt;high blood pressure&lt;/a&gt; , diabetes and high cholesterol, according to the CDC, and lowering your cholesterol and blood pressure may reduce your risk of dying from heart disease.&lt;/p&gt;</p></div> < /div>

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**Septicemia**

Credit: Dreamstime

Septicemia, or [bacteria in the bloodstream](http://www.livescience.com/8831-sepsis-long-term-impact-older-adults-study-finds.html) , killed 34,828 people in 2007. It can result from infections throughout the body, including infections of the lung, abdomen and urinary tract, according to the National Institutes of Health. Treatment of infections, and vaccination with the Haemophilus influenzae B (HIB) vaccine and S. pneumoniae vaccines, can help prevent the condition.

[Kidney disorders](http://www.livescience.com/35081-chronic-kidney-disease-biomarkers-101021.html) including nephritis, nephrotic syndrome, and nephrosis were responsible for 46,448 deaths in 2007. Nephritis is an inflammation of the kidneys that can be caused by infection or an allergic reaction to a drug. Nephrotic syndrome is characterized by a buildup of protein in the urine. Among the causes of the condition are: infection, response to drugs, cancer, immune disorders, diabetes or lupus. Nephrosis is damage to the kidneys that can be caused by pain medication, or chronic conditions such as diabetes, lupus or high blood pressure.

Influenza and pneumonia killed 52,717 people in 2007. Influenza, or [the flu](http://www.livescience.com/9122-7-health-woes-brought-winter.html) , is a respiratory illness caused by a virus. The old, the young and pregnant women are particularly at risk for complications from the flu, according to the CDC. A seasonal flu shot can help prevent infection.

Pneumonia occurs when viruses or bacteria in the lungs cause an infection. Those older than 65 or younger than 5 are at high risk of catching the disease. Vaccination with the flu, pneumococcal, pertussis measles, varicella and Haemophilus influenzae type b vaccines may help prevent infection, according to the CDC. Following good hygiene practices also reduces the risk.

[Diabetes](http://www.livescience.com/10195-1-3-americans-diabetes-2050-cdc.html) accounted for 71,382 deaths in 2007. The condition is characterized by abnormally high blood sugar levels, and can lead to kidney failure, blindness, heart disease and amputations of the lower extremities, such as the feet. Risk factors include obesity, old age, a family history of diabetes and not exercising, according to the CDC. Regular exercise and maintaining a healthy weight can reduce the risk of developing the disease.

[Alzheimer's disease](http://www.livescience.com/35248-alzheimers-brain-plaques-clearence-101209.html) killed 74,632 people in 2007. The condition is the most common form of dementia in older adults, according to the CDC. The disease is characterized by problems with memory, language and thinking and can make it difficult to carry out daily activities.

Alzheimer's typically begins around age 60, and the risk of the disease increases with age. Those with a family history of Alzheimer's or specific genetic traits are at risk for the condition. Reducing head trauma, keeping a healthy heart and maintaining a healthy weight may reduce your risk of the disease, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

Accidents, or unintentional injuries, accounted for 123,706 deaths in 2007. Within this category, the most significant killers were [car accidents](http://www.livescience.com/9203-obesity-increases-risk-death-car-crash.html) , which caused 42,031 deaths; falls, which lead to 22,631 deaths; and poisonings, which killed 29,846 people.

Though accidents were the No. 5 cause of death among all age groups, motor vehicle accidents were the leading cause of death for those under 34 years old, according to the CDC. For those ages 35 to 74, unintentional poisonings, including drug overdoses, account for more deaths than car crashes. Falls are the leading cause of injury-related death among those 65 and older.

Chronic lower respiratory diseases, a group of diseases that affect the airways and lungs, were responsible for 127,924 deaths in 2007. The most lethal chronic lower respiratory disease is [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD](http://www.livescience.com/35095-lung-taste-receptors-asthma-treatment-101025.html) ), which includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Chronic bronchitis is characterized by swollen and narrow airways inside the lung while emphysema is caused by damaged lung air sacs. Both these conditions make breathing difficult.

Smoking is the main culprit behind COPD. Men who smoke are 12 times more likely to die of COPD than men who have never smoked, according to the CDC, and avoiding smoking and secondhand smoke can reduce the risk of this condition.

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Risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, being overweight or obese, drinking excessive amounts of alcohol and smoking. Men have a greater risk of stroke than women. Eating a healthy diet, exercising and maintain a healthy weight are activities that can reduce stroke risk, according to the CDC.

Cancer of all types was responsible for the deaths of more than 562,800 people in 2007. [Cancer](http://www.livescience.com/11041-10-deadliest-cancers-cure.html) refers to uncontrolled cellular growth, which can occur in many different tissue types. The most common cancers in men are prostate cancer, lung cancer and colorectal cancer, according to the CDC.. The most common cancers in women are [breast cancer](http://www.livescience.com/34706-breast-cancer-symptoms-treatment-prevention.html) , followed by lung and colorectal cancer. Lung cancer causes the most deaths among men and women, followed in women by breast cancer.

A combination of hereditary and lifestyle factors likely contribute to a person's cancer risk. Quitting smoking may [reduce the risk of several types of cancer](http://www.livescience.com/35108-10-dos-and-donts-to-reduce-your-risk-of-cancer.html) , including lung and kidney cancer, according to the National Cancer Institute. There is also evidence that a diet rich in fruit and non-starchy vegetables may reduce the risk of mouth, esophagus and stomach cancers. Obesity has been linked to an increased risk of several cancers, including colorectal and endometrial cancer.

[Heart disease](http://www.livescience.com/35257-heart-disease-stroke-mortality-health-costs-101215.html) was the No. 1 cause of death in the United States in 2007. It claimed 616,067 lives, about a quarter of all deaths in the United States. A number of conditions fall into the category of "heart disease," including coronary artery disease the most common type of heart disease and problems with heart rhythm. Risk factors include [obesity](http://www.livescience.com/10249-obesity-reach-42-friend-effect.html) , smoking, [high blood pressure](http://www.livescience.com/34753-hypertension-high-blood-pressure.html) , diabetes and high cholesterol, according to the CDC, and lowering your cholesterol and blood pressure may reduce your risk of dying from heart disease.